

16 June 1982

NOTE FOR: Harry Rowen/Fred Hutchinson

FROM : Hal Ford

SUBJECT : The AG

Before we get further down the path with the DCI and Bob Gates about the AG, I would like to offer up a few propositions, based on my experience as a practitioner and critic of the estimating business.

1. There must be an AG-type operation. Decent estimative materials cannot be produced by scrounging authors from here and there on an ad hoc basis. The Staff was by far the strongest aspect of the old O/NE system, a judgment shared by all, Sherman Kent included. The absence of an estimative staff, from the time Colby dissolved O/NE in 1973 until Turner/Clarke/Lehman formed the NIC in late 1979, was by general agreement a principal reason why the NIEs fell off to such extent during that period, in quantity, quality, and respect. Disbanding the AG is a non-starter.
2. Our experience with the NIC/AG to date shows that, philosophically, the idea of such a group is a valid one. The performance of the AG -- or more correct, the performance of its six or so strong members -- has been exactly what an estimative staff should be, in the best sense. The Director and C/NIC can call on these people at short notice for very difficult special assignments. The skills needed for those staff positions are unique: conceptualizing, writing, checking, boiling down, negotiating. Further, these skills are not necessarily those of good DDI officers, especially if the given DDI individual has previously been steeped in research or current intelligence -- but not estimative -- modes of thought and procedure.
3. What is at stake is that the weaker members of the AG have not pulled their load. Their strong colleagues have done heroic work, quantitatively and qualitatively. So much so that they evoke wide respect.

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There is now a live interest in joining the AG on the part of analysts, at home and abroad, where skepticism reigned at the outset. That six or so AGers have produced as many items, and as good items as they have, is both a tribute to them and a validation of what is needed. All the AG's members have not been involved in drafting inter-agency papers, and can't be until they've proved themselves; otherwise the whole schedule can be thrown out of whack by the fairly-late-in-the-process discovery of a poor draft. This has occurred in two instances in the AG (since April 1980), and in more instances of non-AG drafters. Now, to protect against such schedule upset on the part of AG'ers, we start the new officers in 2E49 on NIC Memos, to see whether these people are capable of taking on the drafting responsibilities of a later NIE, etc.

4. Statistics alone on publications do not tell the whole story. We have known all along how much was being produced in the AG, and who was doing it. Racking up these data has some utility, but only so long as qualitative elements are appreciated as well. Many of the inter-agency pieces produced by AG people have been among the most difficult and sophisticated projects possible, (11-3/8, excepted of course), with non-AG authors often getting the simpler, more straightforward kind of paper. Any statistical display should also take note of the poor quality of some of the drafts received from non-AG authors -- a recent example being the one on Soviet policy in Latin America. Also to be recognized is the intellectual and policy-relevant contribution made by some of the AG-produced NIC Memos: especially those on Castro, Mitterrand, Soviet policy in Africa, and generational politics in West Germany.

5. A good estimates staffer is a rare commodity; there is never any assurance that an officer who has done well in some other setting will do well in the AG. Also, to be worth the candle, an AG must maintain very demanding standards. Note that we have moved several officers out of the AG who either didn't have it or whose talents didn't match AG's needs:

[redacted] We will do the same with some of the new AG people if they do not pan out. Another reason that AG drafts often look pretty good by the time they get to you is that I have invested considerable time in guiding and redrafting them; by and large, the supervisors in the DDI do not work over their officers' work so fully. Such investment of my time has also been worthwhile because it has helped some of the AG'ers to improve the clarity and conciseness of their writing: examples are [redacted]

[redacted] In the case of other AG'ers this has proved a lost cause.

6. We cannot build and keep the kind of AG we need if we continue to manage it on a rotational basis. Good estimative staffers are few: some are born, some have to be developed. We cannot expect to maintain top performance by letting our best people go and rotate new people in, no matter how well they have done in their previous jobs. This means that to do the job right, we should create our own career staff. This does not mean keeping staffers here forever -- that was one of the hazards of the old system. But it does mean keeping them longer than two years or so, and demonstrably showing young officers that a bright CIA future, or springboard, can be assured here with us. (The present absence of this is one of the reasons we will be losing

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7. We can't do the kind of job required with just ten people (or, more correct, about six people), or even with 15. The ideal staff would be some four to five times the size of our six. And, with such a group, which could include some people on rotation, we would be taking much of the present heavy burden off of the DDI (both DDI drafting, and DDI assistance to AG drafting). We should hit up the DCI for more AG slots.

8. In the event we can't have a much enlarged staff and a career service or our own, and thus have to continue to assemble a staff as best we can, we will not be able to do it by a hat-in-hand approach to the DDI and its production offices. We should, of course, keep looking for and keep recruiting the best possible talent we can find from outside, but the chances are high that many of these recruits will not make it (no matter how carefully screened), and that our best chance for getting top-rate staffers will be from within the CIA (and to a much lesser extent from State and DOD). Counting A/NIOs, the NIC has given up many more officers (good officers) to NFAC/DDI in the last year or so than have come the other way. Gates has a splendid opportunity to give us an infusion of a number of his very best analysts. NIC and the DDI will both profit from the experience, as will these detailees. We should get the DCI's chop on such procedure.

9. In the process, we must have closer relations and better understanding between ourselves and the DDI Chief than has existed since the departure of Bruce Clarke. Relations between the AG and the DDI people at the working level are very good for the most part; where they are not, it almost always concerns one of our AG weak sisters. It does seem clear that the DDI front office needs to be better informed about what our 10-man (or 6-man) AG is and is not -- especially since at one point John McMahon expressed the opinion that the AG was a threat of some kind to NFAC/DDI, (and now Bob (with his army of analysts) is not sure that the AG pulls its weight.

Hal F.
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